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"LITTLE TEX."

A Cowboy Tragedy in the Far-Off Owyhee Mountains.

Portland Oregonian.

It was just a year ago to-day that two young men, named Clark and Benton, employed on one of those large cattle ranches that are now to be found only in the territories, started out from the "home station" to hunt up a band of best steers that had been roaming in the hills nearly a dozen miles away. Winter was coming on, and the San Francisco butchers were clamoring for more steers. The two youngsters were employed by John Catlow, an old-timer, who had not been east of the Rockies in thirty years or more. Early in the small fifties he was mining away up in Northern California, where he made good wages, but like all the rest of the big-hearted men of the Argonautic era, spent it as he went along. Early in the sixties he was one of the intrepid band who crossed the Sacramento river near old Fort Reading and struck out eastward over the old emigrant trail. For three hundred odd miles this party of eighty gallant prospectors defied every danger that brave men ever met. Their line of march lay through a trackless wilderness, where bears were thicker than raccoons are in any part of the Sacramento Valley. The large bands of hostile Indians, now fortunately extinct, the Wyalackas and Tachastias, then ranged up and down the streams which united to form the Sacramento, and every night the camp was guarded as though the cohorts of Tamurlane threatened to swoop down upon it. After untold hardships the party reached Jordan Creek, where they found the great Bonanza of War Eagle Mountains. Years rolled by and the diggings were honeycombed. John Catlow began to invest in cattle, and a few years saw him rich and prosperous, with a domain extending further than a horse could gallop in a day. The business of his ranch called for an army of riders; men expert in saddle and born to some other feeling than fear of personal danger. In the morning while the lads were eating breakfast, a long row of saddle horses hitched in front of the door made an appearance as if a company of dragoons had halted and were foraging upon the hospitality of THE IDAHO CATTLE KING, who had the entire range of sixty miles vividly pictured in his mind, just as skillful a pilot knows every rock and snag in his river, and can rely upon escaping them on any night light enough to see the water without a wind ripple. Breakfast over, the cattle king walked slowly to the fire-place, and, filling his monstrous meerschaum with tobacco enough to make an elephant stomp, shoveled up a live coal and tapped it down with his thumb. "Well, boys, I guess we'll be getting ready for another drive to Winnemuck. Carroll, you and Bill Horgan stay home to-day and have the wagon horses shod. Look well to the grub wagon, for I don't want it to break down with the fodder and have to leave it in the desert. Packard will set the shoes on eight horses for you to-day, and nigger Dan will go for cook."

Webfoot," he called, and the next moment he and Frank Benton were bounding over the frosty trail toward the river Owyhee. Fair and lovely reader, I think I can hear the musical ripple of your laughter as you dance in your mad glee over the smooth worn bowlders. When asthma dethroned my strength you clear waters and life giving breezes caused my body to be born anew.

DAMON AND PYTHIAS.

Some six years previous to the period of this story a man named French had owned a portion of the range of which Catlow is now sole master. He built a strong corral on the line between himself and his neighbor, with the understanding that both should have free use of it in consideration of the water right, which was from a spring on Catlow's land. Hence the corral got its name and retained it long after its builder had sold out west of the country. The lads rode along by it and afforded a strange contrast as they galloped side by side. Nathan Clark was a plump, muscular young man, with dark hair and eyes, betraying his nationality in the gulf states; Benton, the only native of Oregon in the whole outfit of cowboys on old John's ranch, was of slight figure, and features delicate enough for a school girl. His frame was of the stub-and-twist order, however, and he was active as a cat. At first "Webfoot" was the general butt of the camp; but as he was very conscientious in the discharge of his duty, he soon grew into favor with the older herdsmen and the major-domo who kept the accounts of the ranch. Apparently slight in figure and delicate of constitution, he was as sinewy and powerful a man of his weight as could be found. Born on the banks of the grand old Columbia, at Hood river, just when Oregon was knocking at the door of Congress for admission into the Union, he had shared the drugery incidental to the life of an Oregon settler until 1879, when he went out to Snake river with a party of prospectors from The Dalles. The placers proved worthless and the party disbanded at Silver City, where he entered into the service of his present employer. Between him and "Little Tex" had grown up a brotherly affection. They rode together at all hours, and were the first in the saddle and the last to dismount. One day Bill Farr said: "Tex, I think you and Webfoot had better get married."

Nate Clark's face flushed with anger for a moment, and then he said in a quiet way:

"If I knew a woman that I thought as much of as I do of Frank Benton, I would marry her to-morrow."

IN THE ICY WATERS OF THE OWYHEE.

The two men now dashed in and out the stunted trees with loud cries of "Hoop-la!" "Git home, old Nig!" "Out of that, Timberfoot!" "Look at 'em, Broadburn!" And soon the whole band were cantering slowly down the hill towards the Owyhee river. It was a lovely autumn day, clear and cool. The cloudless sky above, and the air, purer than can be found anywhere else, tinged with frost even at noon, betokened an early and severe winter. From Juniper Flat to the "home station" of the ranch was about twenty-two miles southeast, while the old and decaying town called Silver City was about a like distance. At last the band reached a grove of cottonwoods on the bank of the Owyhee, and "Tex" rode ahead to the water's edge, to keep the herd from going down stream. Above the ford the water was so deep that they would not attempt it. At last the leaders of the band had crossed safely to the opposite bank. Benton was bringing up the rear, and the last of the stragglers was already in the water, which was cold as ice and swifter than a mill race. Nathan Clark then started his horse forward, and as he did so the horse stumbled and threw his head back wildly in his efforts to regain his footing. As he did so, his head struck Clark full in the face and knocked him out of the saddle. Before he could recover himself he was thirty yards down stream, where he sank into a deep hole. He came up with a frantic scream and sank back to rise no more. Poor Frank Benton was nearly crazed with anguish as he saw his friend disappear in the angry waters, and beheld the terrified horse galloping homeward with the saddle turned under his belly. It was past noon, but the day had never grown warm. Frank drove the last of the cattle over, knowing they would not cross back again.

A RIDERLESS HORSE.

In the mean time Cobley had separated the polygamist "Blue Peter" from the quadruped hours of his harum, and was about to ride down to the ford to meet Clark and Benton, when he recollected that it was nearly noon, and there was to be a pot-pie for dinner at the ranch house. Moreover, it was to be prairie chicken pot-pie, so Cobley must take it in. So he led the old bull up to the stable and got those five bulls to get a plate at the second table.

"See anything of Tex and Webfoot in your travels, Cobley?" asked the proprietor of the ranch.

"No; I reckon they had a job huddlin' the band," was Cobley's reply.

"I shouldn't think so," replied Frank. "You old dave like this they generally get in among the Junipers, and it don't take long to get 'em together. Ride down and meet them after you finish dinner."

Cobley mounted again as soon as he had finished dinner and rode back toward the river. As he emerged from the hollow where the French corral stood he saw the band of steers coming down the trail which led over the low divide.

"So here they are at last. Why, they are way ahead of the boys. 'Taint right to run a band of fasteers as hard as that. The old man will give them fits for this—It's some of

THE OTTAWA CYLINDER CORN SHELLER,



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Webfoot's don't. By Jinks, ef here an old Chalkline gain' like a coat with the saddle under his belly. What's up, I wonder?"

The terrified horse galloped up the corral and Cobley dismounted. Approaching Chalkline carefully, he first patted him on the neck and then began to extricate him from the mass of track with which he was entangled. The horse's knees were badly skinned, indicating that he had a severe fall. Cobley led him back to the stables, saying:

"There's something gone wrong with 'Little Tex,' for I caught Chalkline near the corral with the saddle turned. The cat's are round there and they're pretty badly fit up. But I rode up to the head of the low divide and could see nothing of the boys."

"There must be something the matter," said Mr. Catlow, with a look of alarm. "Tex and Web never would have run the steers like that; and then the sorrel horse comin' home alone, too. Wait, and I'll go with you."

An iron-gray stallion, a son of the mighty Lodi, stood at the barn door. Vaulting into the saddle with a lightness not to be expected in a man of his years, old John and Cobley rode down to the corral, where they spent an hour in penning up the steers. Then they started for the river, but not a sign could they see of the boys. It was now past 3 o'clock, and the dull, gray, leaden sky foretold a cold and pitiless night.

LOSSING THE BODY.

Meanwhile, Frank Benton had pursued his search for the body of his lost companion. It was too late in the year for hydraulic mining, and the river was quite clear. He rode slowly along the bank and looked into every hole. Everywhere he could see the bottom, but not a glimpse of the body of his friend. A bright thought struck him. "The big drift below the muddy crossing," he said, and put spurs to his horse for a point five miles down the river from where "Little Tex" lost his life. Half an hour later he stood beside a vast "jam" of logs of every imaginable kind of timber. There was a hat swirling about in the foaming eddy. The water had scarcely known what to do. The water was forty feet deep behind the jam, and probably his dead friend lay at the bottom of it. In his despair he gave a glance up the stream, and saw an object rolling down through a riffle. It caught against a snag. It was the body of Nathan Clark.

Swift water and a tired man are not easily reconciled. Benton felt that if he sighted from his horse and undertook to lift his dead friend out of the water, he might become paralyzed with cold and lose the body altogether. So he rode in as close to the snag as he could and made a noose of his riata, which he slipped over the dead man's shoulder. Then, springing his horse, he dragged the corpse out on the river bank.

"Oh, God forgive me," thought the tender hearted youth, "for losing a human being like if he was a dumb brute."

A glance at the dead man's face revealed the fact that his forehead was crushed in by the fearful blow received from the horse's head. His clothing was frozen stiff, and as he lay upon the bank, old and stark, his sightless eyes were turned up to the sky just reddening with the last glow of departing day. What to do with him was now Frank's perplexity. If he left him there the wolves and panthers might mutilate the body. No, he must lift him on his horse and take him home to the ranch. Stay, it was every foot of twenty-three miles to Silver City; and they would have to take him to Silver City for burial. It was settled. Frank lifted that body across his saddle and lashed it securely, face downward. Then taking the bridle reins in his hand he started on a sharp walk. He looked at his watch nervously.

"Half past four o'clock. Lads than an hour of daylight."

A TERRIBLE JOURNEY.

The first four miles of walking did not appear the very Oregon by very much. But as darkness drew on and before he began to feel the intense cold, which nippen his thin features, and seemed to chill the very marrow in his bones. He walked along with sore feet and aching heart, and thoughts of his master's anxiety at his absence. At times a night bird would pass him with booming sound, and from a lonely cairn of rocks on the hillside would ring out the lonely bark of a coyote. All else was still, and in the chill starlit night he was nearly perishing with cold. Lighting a match he looked at his watch and it was past nine o'clock. Nervous and agitated beyond all usual habit, he trudged upon a broad road crossed with several wagon tracks and full of deep ruts. It was the county road leading from Boise to Winnemucca.

"It can't be more than eight miles more, and perhaps, by all that's good, there's a light now."

He walked along for an hour, which seemed like an age, but the light had gone out. At last he stood in front of an adobe hovel where lived a man named Columbus Kilbourn, called "Oum" for short. Benton's voice was weak as he called for help, and was answered by the loud bark of a dog. Then came a rattling at who

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only window in the hovel as a voice called out:

"What the dragon do you want?"

"Help, in God's name!" answered the perishing man; "I'm nearly dead with cold!"

"Hit's only three miles to Booneville. Go on there," replied Oum.

"I can go no further. My horse's given out, and I'm nearly dead with the cold. Let me in, d—"

"Dear'd I like to. You may be a very good man and you may be a dorned Walla Walla horse thief bound for Wood river," growled Mr. Kilbourn, angry at being disturbed so late.

"For God's sake, don't turn me off," pleaded Frank. "I'm here with the dead body of a friend, Nate Clark."

"Dunno anybody of that name," said the voice from the window.

"They sometimes called him 'Little Tex,'" sobbed Frank.

"Why the dragon didn't you say so! Hold on, stranger."

THE COFFIN.

Five minutes later Frank's tired horse was in the adobe barn, munching his hay. The body was rolled in an old blanket and laid in the straw. Kilbourn kindled a fire and gave the famishing boy a cup of hot coffee and a venison steak. Frank piled up in an old bunk and was soon fast asleep. When he woke up in the morning the coffee pot was singing on the fire, but the room felt cold. He looked up, and half the roof was gone.

"What's the matter with your roof, Mr. Kilbourn?" he asked.

"Nuthin', my son, only I had no other board for to make a coffin for poor Little Tex. Durned it there wasn't lots of good leather in that by. So I tore off the shakes."

This is no fiction. I can prove it by a score of witnesses. Idaho is the "last ditch" of the noble army of argonauts that are dropping off like autumn leaves. Like the last square that stood by Canbronne on the night of Waterloo's rout—they die, but never surrender. They rough follow who undared his house in that timberless desert to make a coffin for a friend, performed a heroic act, but one that would have been but an every day occurrence in the days of '49. A year or more and he will also be placed upon the master roll of the nameless heroes.

Tex," and Frank Benton wears a handsome gold watch instead of his old silver one. It is the gift of his employer as the reward of fidelity.

Frank.

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